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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 002251

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/06/2012

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: PROPOSED MIDDLE EAST CONFERENCE GREETED WITH SKEPTICISM

Classified By: CDA GREGORY L. BERRY FOR REASON 1.5 (B) AND (D).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) A survey of political contacts suggests a general lack of enthusiasm over the recent Quartet proposal to stage a Middle East conference in the next few weeks. The GOJ has endorsed the proposal with some caveats. While several contacts condemned outright the idea of a conference, a few made tentative suggestions about its content. Most contacts questioned the need for such a conference when there are a number of previously agreed upon measures that have not been implemented. Most contacts were also deeply skeptical about Israeli intentions if such a conference takes place. End Summary.

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GOJ ENDORSES CONFERENCE PROPOSAL  
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2. (C) The GOJ has publicly reacted positively to the idea of a conference, focusing on its content and its participants. King Abdullah issued a public statement from Washington saying that the conference should be based on relevant international resolutions, President Bush's speech to the UN, and the Saudi initiative. King Abdullah also stressed that all parties should participate in the conference. Privately, however, GOJ contacts have a number of questions about the concept. Foreign Minister Muasher's personal assistant Ali al-Ayed, told PolCouns that it is the substance of a conference and its necessary outcome--creation of a Palestinian state--that would likely govern the level of the GOJ's support. Jordan, he said, would hope any conference would not be "just another forum for expressing views," but rather geared to concrete political accomplishments.

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JORDANIANS SUSPICIOUS OF CONFERENCE'S PURPOSE  
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3. (C) Outside the government, some Jordanians welcomed the call for a conference with qualifications. However, all were concerned that the real purpose of the conference was to change the rules of the peace process and annul Oslo, Mitchell, and Tenet. East Banker and former Minister Nasir Lawzi endorsed the conference if the purpose was to find a way to implement Mitchell and Tenet. He urged the U.S. to include Syria and Lebanon in the conference, so the entire region would be onboard. He also cautioned that no such conference could be held without Arafat, a condition echoed by many contacts. Former Royal Court advisor Adnan Abu Odeh favored the concept of a conference if it had the moral authority to implement any results, but also thought the conference would find little popular support in Jordan.

4. (C) Among less moderate Jordanians, the conference was roundly criticized. One PolFSN contact reinforced the widely-felt distrust of Israeli intentions towards peace negotiations, "Israel has its own agenda--if it really wanted peace, why did it not agree to the Saudi plan?" The same source accused Israel of asking for this conference as a way to delay and drag out the issues. Faleh Taweel, former Jordanian Ambassador to Iraq and an advocate of most anti-Israeli conspiracy theories, said that "if the conference is going to be based on the Saudi initiative, it will be accepted." Press coverage in Jordan was both suspicious and skeptical of the conference, and more moderate Palestinians appeared frustrated with the idea. "Why not implement what we've already decided on?" One press contact viewed the conference as likely to be insignificant if it is held below the summit level. Almost all contacts agree that Arafat, Syria, and Lebanon must be involved if the conference is to have any legitimacy.

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COMMENT  
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5. (C) While the GOJ endorses the idea of a conference, many Jordanians view the proposal as ineffective--or worse, as a U.S.-backed Israeli plan to dismantle previous agreements and to deflect popular anger. Our argument that a political process is one necessary part of any progress is greeted with

deep skepticism. The Jordanians' comments reflect a growing level of frustration with the drawn-out nature of the political process, seen here as having gained little for Palestinians over the past 9 years.

BERRY